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BRIEF MENTION.

Some time ago reading the life and letters of a divine, celebrated in his day both for his scholarship and eloquence, I came across the following entry, which naturally arrested my attention: "Gildersleeve was glad to meet somebody interested in grammar, and sat late, very full of talk." "Very full of talk" is a homely phrase and might seem to hold a covert sneer; but Dr. Broadus was fond of homely phrases, and in any case I do not resent the impeachment. 'Tis nothing more than Chaucer's "Gladly wolde he teche," and the apostolic injunction, "To do good and to communicate forget not," might well serve as a motto for all teachers. A recent writer has called self-expression a mania of the times; self-expression and self-impression go back to the protoplast, Adam, and to the mother of all living, Eve. More than a decade after Dr. Broadus made that comment on the youthful professor of nearly sixty years syne, I opened my essay on Grammar and Aesthetics with a frank confession, which I take the liberty of reproducing from an out-of-print and out-of-date volume:

"Minute specialization is one of the prominent features of modern science. It is not peculiar to modern culture, for subdivision of the professions is as old as the Pyramids. In the Athens of the best times there were those who made their living by the manufacture of hair-nets. An epigram of Martial informs us that there were surgeons in Rome who limited their practice to the effacement of the scars that disfigured the persons of branded slaves. But the narrowness of a handicraft is different from the narrowness of an intellectual pursuit, or rather an intellectual pursuit is reduced by this narrowness to a handicraft; and in this second half of the nineteenth century the joyous and adventurous swing of the human mind through the range of knowledge and science which marked the first half has been quieted down to a sober pace, not to say a treadmill gait. The line along which the earlier investigators flamed is now traversed by the solitary track-walker, who turns his lantern on every inch of the ground, and travel is often interdicted on account of the insecurity of the road. So much the better for those who are to come after us, but meanwhile life is lonely for the explorer. For times come to every such man when he feels an imperious necessity of justifying himself to them that are without, of seeking a larger audience than the narrow circle of his disciples and associates. True, the utter failure to come to an understanding with the rest of the world often sends the student back to his special work with a determination never again to attempt any communication with his fellows except on the most ordinary topics of social converse, and to lead his intellectual life alone."

In this outgiving I was not generalizing from my own experience, for I have encountered more than one specialist who could not suppress the desire to let the outside world know what the

inward fire was that warmed his soul. A signal example among my acquaintances was Prof. Sylvester who was a colleague of mine for seven years at the J. H. U. I cannot say that he honoured me with his friendship. Even his acquaintance was a somewhat perilous privilege. So explosive was he that I consider it the greatest achievement of my social life that I managed to cross the ocean with him as my room-mate with not even an approach to personal difficulty. In the course of those seven years we were often thrown together officially and socially, and I often had occasion to admire the manifestations of his large and luminous intellect. No matter what subject came up, he turned upon it, as it were, a bull's-eye lantern, which lighted it up, not without some danger, however, lest there be fire as well as light. His line of mathematics was far above my mental reach, but for all that he would try to make me apprehend, not comprehend, the character of his achievements, and, being a man of vivid imagination, he would often resort to metaphor and simile for my enlightenment. His face was as expressive as his head was impressive, and I can picture his countenance all aglow with rapture at his discoveries, which always seemed to come to him as revelations. There is no real egotism in the enthusiasm of men of genius over their own success. As Goethe says, "Alles ist als wie geschenkt." One day he said to me, in regard to his most recent achievement: "I looked up and saw a huge bird, perhaps the fabulous roc; it laid one crystal egg, then another, and yet a third; I gazed intently, gazed long; there was not a fourth, never will be a fourth." Again he said: "There is a group of malefactors. Other mathematicians have been able to tell the number constituting the group. I have laid my hand on the culprit and told him, 'Thou art the man.'" I am myself not averse to tropical language, and I sometimes took refuge in it when he pressed me with questions. But the answer I can recall was one which I made when he expressed his surprise that American mathematicians had shewn such a proclivity to problems of four-dimensional geometry. "We Americans," I said, "being a crude and primitive people are much given to practical jokes of the Howleglas order, and four-dimensional geometry seems to me a somewhat practical joke on space." Of course this use of tropical language is a snare, especially if one mistakes an illustration for an argument, a mistake often made by those who occupy high seats in the synagogue of thinkers, who indeed are better called tinkers. I knew intimately one old professor, whose textbook was Butler's Analogy. I have nothing to say against Butler's Analogy, into which I have not looked for seventy years, but this expounder and admirer of Butler used to manufacture similes and argue from them. He told me that he did not learn to make similes until he was turned of fifty; after that he poured them out by

the score, apparently with the same ease that I now (1920) fabricate sonnets. He reminded me of those sophists of the second century, like Marcus Aurelius and Fronto, who exchanged similes, as the French sophists of a later day exchanged caractères. "Arguing from analogy," I said to him, "seems to me like arguing from a parallel line that you can reach to a parallel line that you cannot reach." "A capital illustration," he said incautiously. "But," I remarked, "one must first prove that the lines are parallel." Then ensued a thoughtful silence. A trivial anecdote, doubtless, and almost incredible to those who knew the party of the other part—a man noted for his penetrative intellect and dreaded for his caustic wit. But old birds are often caught by chaff if the chaff somewhat simulates the favourite grain.

Great are the uses of figurative language as well as the abuses. Reputations have been made by the simple process of extracting from a word the bottle imp that has been put in it at the beginning. I have recently read of one retired statesman whose favourite reading is said to be Skeat's Etymological Dictionary, which he scans in order to preserve and acquire exactness of phraseology. As all language is full of metaphors, he who watches his composition from that point of view will be comforted by an array of figures that jostle and swear at each other in a long procession. As in life, it is the part of wisdom to take things at their face value, and one of the most charming of languages is one that least reveals its secrets. The great masters of English style were not etymologists, and one would look in vain among great etymologists for exemplars of English style. The Elizabethan divined the artistic force of the words as the Greek sculptors divined the muscles under the skin. It is somewhat disillusioning to learn that Swinburne carried about with him a rhyming dictionary, and doubtless many modern stylists have found Roget's Thesaurus a help in the choice of epithets. Indeed, the Germans have prepared a dictionary of their own language after the same pattern, and confessedly so, but I very much question whether March's more elaborate book has ever been made the man of counsel by those who handle our speech best. Over-consciousness is fatal to the best work, and the substitution of Anglo-Saxon equivalents for words of Latin or French origin in our vocabulary has not been encouraged by the experiments of those who are Anglo-Saxon mad. 'Forecast' is an improvement on 'prognostication,' but 'foreword' for 'preface' is not an unqualified gain. The opaque gods¹ are, after all, the great gods, and the quality of mercy is not to be strained through an etymological sieve.

¹ A. J. P. 17. 363.

In my boyhood, I was an enthusiastic admirer of Shelley. Above all other poems my favourite was "The Cloud." I not only committed it to memory, but actually tried to translate it into Latin in the metre of *solvitur acris hiems*. In the flagrant times of the Civil War, I prepared a parody of the whole poem, in which I set forth the great duel between Lee and Grant. Parody is not necessarily criticism; in this case at least it represented devotion. The following stanza I never tired of repeating:

For after the rain, when, with never a stain,
The pavilion of Heaven is bare,
And the winds and sunbeams with their convex gleams
Build up the blue dome of air,
I silently laugh at my own cenotaph,
And out of the caverns of rain,
Like a child from the womb, like a ghost from the tomb,
I arise and unbuild it again.

Shelley has put a deeper meaning into Horace's *obscurum deterget nubila caelo saepe Notus*, and I have often given the image a practical application to my own fancies—or what other people call fancies—in the way of interpretation. Wilamowitz has compared all the exegesis of Pindar down to his own day to mere clouds and thanks God that they have been swept away,—swept away, presumably, by the homely broom of German Pindarists. Shelley's winds are represented by the counterblasts of Teutonic criticism and his sunbeams by Wilamowitz himself, shining, like the sun, *έρήμας δι' αἰθέρος*. The same fate may overtake my recent study of the homologies of sonnet and epigram, but I shall doubtless 'laugh at my own cenotaph' and proceed to furnish illustrations of my own theory, as I have done in the following transfusion of Callimachus' Heraclitus epigram:

They told me, Heraclitus, thou wast dead.
Death is the common lot—too well we know—
Of every thing that lives and moves below
The brazen heavens. And yet, what tears I shed
When I remembered how the hours sped!
Unheeded they would come, unheeded go,
While our discourse kept up its happy flow
Until the sun sank to his ocean bed.
Son of the Sea-horn, Halicarnassian friend,
Long since, long since, thou hast returned to dust;
Thy play is over, and thy work is done;
The angel Azrael, who puts an end
To mortal men, thy tuneful voice hath hushed—
And yet, thy Nightingales live on, sing on.

Of course this is not a translation, but maceration; and I hear from the farther shore the protest of my indulgent critic William Hayes Ward, of the Independent, against my treatment of the famous *Πῶς γενόμην* epigram.²

B. L. G.

² A. J. P. 12. 111.